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ABSTRACT

The realization that many teachers view working with parents as the most challenging aspect of their job led to an ethnographic examination (within the context of an evaluation of the South Dakota Head Start/Public School Transition Demonstration Project) of parents' and teachers' expectations of one another. The demonstration group consisted of children and families receiving comprehensive Head Start-like services in addition to educational services, and a comparison group consisted of children and families receiving only educational services. Eight family service coordinators maintained routine contacts with families and schools and provided services directly to families or through referral to other agencies. Comprehensive services included health, parent involvement, social, and educational services related to transition from preschool to public elementary school. Data were collected in the spring of each year since 1993 from 200 of the 425 children in 2 cohorts who have received services. Kindergarten through third grade teachers at comparison and demonstration schools were also asked during structured interviews to identify both their greatest challenge as teachers and parents' role in education, while selected parents/caregivers at both sites were asked about their communication with the school. Results indicated that parents and teachers had adversarial roles at times and held different expectations. Teachers wanted parents to become more involved in the schools, yet parents believed they were already involved. Teachers believed that the schools communicated well with parents, but the parents disagreed. Parents and teachers found the most agreement in their desire for the educational success of children. (Contains about 54 references.) (KB)

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What Teachers Want From Parents and What Parents Want From Teachers: Similarities and Differences

Paper Presented at the American Education Research Association

(AERA) Annual Meeting, March 24-28, 1997

Chicago, Illinois

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Abstract

Head Start-like services have been provided in six different South Dakota schools through the South Dakota Head Start/Public School Transition Demonstration Project. An ethnographic evaluation, implemented in 1993, has generated data on teacher and parent expectations and home-school communication. Results, consistent with previous research, indicate that parents and teachers have adversarial roles at times and different expectations. Teachers want parents to become more involved in the schools, yet parents believe they are already involved. Schools believe they communicate well with parents, but the parents disagree. Parents and teachers find the most agreement in their desire for the educational success of children.

What Teachers Want From Parents and What Parents Want From Teachers: Similarities and Differences

A giant "red flag" appeared to me during data coding and analysis. A teacher had stated that parents were the most challenging aspect of her job! To my surprise, several other teachers had similar responses. I was expecting to find responses similar to ones I had found during my previous three years as project ethnographer. The "usual" responses, such as a "how to fit everything in," and "how to meet the needs of every child," were generally classroom related. This year (1996), for some reason, was different. I began to ask myself, "How many teachers feel that parents are their greatest challenge? Have responses been similar in the past and simply passed over?" Do comparison and demonstration teacher responses differ? "What do teachers expect from parents? What do parents expect from teachers? Do comparison and demonstration parents have different expectations? As you can see, these questions became the seed that prompted my search of the data and literature and that developed into this paper.

The literature provided many examples of what teachers expected from parents. Parent involvement in the educational experiences of their children was most frequently cited (Chrispeels, 1996; Daniels, 1996; Epstein, 1995; Huffman, Benson, Gebelt, & Phelps, 1996; Griffith, 1996; Mantzicopoulos & Neuharth-Pritchett, 1996; Moore & Brown, 1996; Rosenthal & Young Sawyers, 1996; Sanders, 1996; Thompson, 1996; Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992; Vickers, 1994; Wescott Dodd, 1996; Zeldin, 1990). The effective schools literature pointed to parent support as

desired by schools and a critical factor in children's achievement (Epstein, 1995; Funk & Brown, 1996; Griffith, 1996; Huffman et al., 1996; Keith, T. Z., Keith, P. B., Quirk, Cohen-Rosenthal, & Franzese, 1996; Mantzicopoulos & Neuharth-Pritchett, 1996; Moore & Brown, 1996; Rogers Tracy, 1995; Rosenthal & Young Sawyers, 1996; Sanders, 1996; Thompson, 1996; Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992; Vickers, 1994; Zeldin, 1990).

Very few journal articles addressed what parents wanted from schools. A study conducted by Glover (1992) explored criteria used by parents in the judgement of school quality. Glover found that most parents were interested in educational outcomes, pupil support, and discipline. Glover concluded that parents wanted a school which was "pupil centered."

Lindle (1989) examined the relationship between schools and families and found that most parents felt that teachers and principals were, "too business-like," "patronizing," or they "talked down" to them. Parents also resented the formal and limited time frame of conferences, preferring regular informal contacts through notes or phone calls. Lindle reported that parents found a "personal touch" as the most enhancing factor in schools relations. Parents did not look for favors from teachers and expected teachers to provide appropriate discipline for their children (Lindle, 1989). Parents expected to be informed of disciplinary measures (or other teacher-child interaction problems) by teachers in a timely manner. Other positive items noted by Lindle included educational programs open to parents and schools who valued working parents' needs.

NTP as Context

Head Start, a preschool program that has provided comprehensive services to children and families for over thirty years, has recently been expanded into selected elementary schools through implementation of the National Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project (NTP). In September of 1991, the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families awarded thirty-two grants to community based consortiums. The consortiums were responsible for designing and implementing approaches that would successfully support children and families as they left Head Start and began their early elementary (kindergarten to third grade) experience. The consortium partners are a local Head Start agency, local education agencies, and a local higher education institution.

In accordance with the Federal Register, each Project selected two groups of participants: (a) a demonstration group composed of children and families who receive comprehensive Head Start-like services in addition to the educational services provided by their local education agency, and (b) a comparison group composed of children and families who receive only the educational services provided by their local education agency. A second cohort of kindergarten children was added in the fall of 1993. The NTP is testing the hypothesis that providing continuous comprehensive services to former Head Start children as they move from kindergarten through third grade will maintain and enhance the early benefits attained by the Head Start children and their families (Kennedy, 1993).

Comprehensive services are provided in four areas, social services, health, education, and parent involvement. At the present, Cohort II children are in the third grade.

SDTP as Context

South Central Child Development, Inc., which provides Head Start services to children and families in a sixteen county area in south central South Dakota, is the grantee for the Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Project (SDTP) within the state. Consortium partners are nine local education agencies located throughout the South Central Child Development, Inc. (SCCD) service area and the University of South Dakota's Center for Interactive Technologies in Education and Corporations. The Educational Research and Service Center (ERSC) conducts independent evaluation of the SDTP through a contractual agreement with SCCD. Of the nine local education partners (school districts), four are SDTP demonstration sites only, three are comparison sites only, and two that contain multiple elementary buildings serve as both demonstration and comparison sites.

The SDTP sites are located primarily in rural nonadjacent counties. Butler Flora et al. (1992) defined rural and nonadjacent counties as counties that do not have places of 2,500 or more population and are not adjacent to a metropolitan county. Two South Dakota sites are located in less urbanized nonadjacent counties. Less urbanized nonadjacent counties are counties with an urban population of 2,555 to 19,999 and not adjacent to a metropolitan county (Butler Flora et al., 1992). The

majority of the population are Caucasian Americans (60%-75%) with Native American children and families the majority of the remainder (20%-35%). About one-fourth of the families in the area could be identified as low-income recipients, and single parents head about one-third of the households.

The elementary schools vary in size and composition of students. Some schools include pre-school through high school, some are only kindergarten through fifth grade, and some have primarily Native American students. School sizes range from about 100 students to about 600. On the average, about 225 Cohort I students have received services and about 200 Cohort II students continue to receive SDTP comprehensive services. Of the children enrolled in the SDTP, 110 Cohort I and 90 Cohort II students are part of the NTP Core Data Set.

Comprehensive Head Start-like services are provided to SDTP demonstration participants by eight family service coordinators (FSCs). The FSCs provide the services either through referrals to local and regional agencies or through direct service. The FCSs maintain routine contacts with families and schools in an effort to improve communication between homes and schools, help families gain access to needed resource/service agencies, assist teachers/administrators to develop relationships with service providers, and provide other support as needed and/or possible that will allow parents/caregiver to enhance their role in their children's school experience.

Theoretical Framework

The study described herein was designed to provide descriptive and

interpretive data on the implementation of the NTP in South Dakota. The descriptive data will be used to "explain" or assist in understanding the quantitative results of the NTP Core Data Set. The NTP Core Data Set is comprised of standardized assessments which are administered yearly to the children and the children's parents, teachers, and principals at all thirty-one sites.

The process of program implementation in South Dakota as well as the problems and solutions to those problems are questions we are concerned with. The phenomenological data of the ethnographic study will help us to understand the experiences of the actors involved in the SDTP. Understanding the experiences of teachers and parents will help answer the questions proposed by this paper and provide insight into parent and teacher interactions.

Ethnography has been chosen as the framework because of its holistic approach. The "whole view" will help understand the intended and unintended consequences of various interaction patterns occurring as a result of SDTP implementation. According to the research, ethnography can offer implicit or explicit explanations to account for interaction patterns (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Fetterman, 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1992; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spradley, 1979, 1980).

Ethnographers are being used more frequently in educational evaluation than they have been used in the past (Greene & McClintock, 1991; Hess, 1992; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, 1984; Worthen & Sanders, 1991). According to LeCompte and Goetz, the reasons for the increase are due to the growth of educational

ethnography and the limitations of quantitative research designs (1982). Hess states that the strength of ethnographic research lies in its descriptions of local situations (1992). Descriptions of policy implementation explain how policies are implemented, why actors in the implementation process are acting as they are, and why policies are or are not successful (Hess, 1992; Peshkin, 1993). Bigler (1996) states that while educational policy may be issued at state or national level, it is supported or resisted, implemented or subverted at the local level. Bigler adds that one must look to the local level to understand how local actors interpret and respond to proposals for change.

Data Generation

Ethnographic data collection techniques, both interactive and noninteractive strategies, are used at the SDTP site. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) describe ethnographic data collection methods as being on a continuum of interactive to noninteractive. Pelto and Pelto define interactive strategies as methods which involve interactions between researcher and participant (1978). Noninteractive methods are less obtrusive and less reactive (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). Interactive strategies used in the SDTP ethnographic study are participant observations, structured interviewing, and unstructured interviewing. Noninteractive methods used are content analyses of human artifacts.

The structured interviews utilize protocols developed at the SDTP site and are unique to the site. The protocols evoke open-ended responses and are given once yearly to demonstration and comparison participants. Utilizing comparison

participants assists in searching for disconfirming evidence. Since only one ethnographer generates the data, the structured interviews help to compare responses across SDTP sites. Firestone and Herriott suggest that using a single investigator and standardized "instruments" increases reliability of the study (1984). The number of people interviewed each year has varied as the SDTP moves through the school system. About 300 structured interviews have been recorded since SDTP implementation.

Unstructured interviews take place as need or opportunity presents itself. Unstructured interviews help clarify what I have observed or define the meaning of events that have taken place in the sites.

I spend on the average of two days per week in the field for about two to four months each year "shadowing" FSCs as they go about their work. I shadow the FSCs to learn what they do, how they do it, why they do it, problems they encounter while implementing the SDTP, and solutions they develop for the problems. Participant observations are scheduled in advance and are rarely unannounced, as recommended by the literature (Agar, 1986; Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Spradley, 1979, 1980). Unscheduled observations are limited to impromptu visits at the schools during the time spent shadowing FSCs. Restricting observations to scheduled visits prevents my knowing a "typical day in the life of a FSC," but it would be impossible to observe the family service coordinators any other way. On an average day, a FSC may visit between eight to ten different homes, numerous community agencies, and one or two

schools. It would be next to impossible locate FSCs over the vast sparsely populated area they cover. Several FSCs travel from fifty to one hundred miles round-trip every day.

Sketchy notes are taken during convenient times in the field. Notes are never taken during home visits, because I feel it would be distracting and take away from the conversational quality of the visit. Note taking is also not done during school visits for a number of reasons: (a) I am very often an active participant in the classroom food activities that are presented by FSCs. (b) note taking and preparing food at the same time are impossible, and (c) note taking is distracting to students. My goal is to be as unobtrusive in the classrooms as possible.

One of the times note taking is possible in the field is when I ride with FSCs. As stated earlier, there is a considerable amount of travel time between home and school visits due to the sparse population of South Dakota. The time spent in FSCs' cars traveling between homes, agencies, and institutions allows time to build rapport with FSCs and provides opportunities for spontaneous interviews. The presence of FSCs allows me to check the accuracy of my observations and meaning assigned to the observations. The field notes are expanded to include descriptions, observations, and personal reflections when I return home.

The collection of artifacts includes journals written by FSCs at my request, written communication between schools and parents/caregivers, printed materials distributed by community agencies, and printed materials distributed by FSCs to

families and schools. Journals help provide insight into program implementation and help to understand the perspectives of FSCs.

I use the HyperResearch computer program as a tool to help make sense of the data (Researchware Inc., 1994. It facilitates data reduction through coding procedures and theory development through the use of bolean statements. Data analysis began with the onset of data collection and is ongoing. Common themes emerge when datum incidents are assigned a descriptive or directional code, as suggested by the literature (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Datum incidents may be as small as one sentence or as large as several paragraphs.

Data are triangulated through multiple data generation methods and multiple data sources. According to the literature, triangulation is useful to discover and corroborate the meaning assigned to lived experiences by the actors (Adler, P. A. & Adler, P., 1994; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Janesick, 1994; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Smith & Robbins, 1984).

Restricted Access

The spread-out nature of the South Dakota site, inclement weather, and graduate student status of the ethnographer have restricted time in the field. I was a graduate student and only able to work part-time on data generation from June, 1993, until the fall of 1996. At that time, I was hired full-time. Multiple data generation methods and length of the study help to compensate for reduced time in the field. I have not been able to move past the "outsider" status in all the

communities, especially in the Native American community. Research debates whether one is ever able to gain "insider" knowledge of these communities (Stanfield, 1994).

Perspectives of Co-Authors and Bias Checks

The paper herein represents the combined efforts of the co-authors. The multi-disciplinary backgrounds of the co-authors enrich the ethnographer's interpretations and serve to check biases of the ethnographer. The disciplinary backgrounds of the co-authors in early-childhood education, elementary education, special education, teacher education, educational administration, program implementation, and educational evaluation combine with my background in sociology and research to enhance "Verstehen" or understanding (Weber, 1904/1949). As ethnographer, I have been primarily responsible for the design and implementation of the ethnographic study. The article uses the "I" voice of the ethnographer as well as the "We" voice of the co-authors.

I utilize an additional bias check during data generation that is suggested by the literature (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Kirk & Miller, 1986; Spradley, 1979; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The bias check involves recording my feelings and assumptions as "observer comments" in a journal. The journal serves to document my thought processes during data generation and helps me to "know" and to "understand" my perspectives, logic, and assumptions.

Results

Teachers at comparison and demonstration schools were asked during their

structured interviews: "What is your greatest challenge as a teacher," and "What role do parents play in eduction." We summarized the teachers' responses and separated them into two sections, comparison and demonstration. The responses suggest answers to several questions: (a) "What do teachers expect from parents, (b) how many teachers feel that parents are their greatest challenge, and (c) do comparison and demonstration teacher responses differ." Searching through data collected from 1993 to 1996 will tell us if there has been any change in teachers' expectations.

During the structured interviews, selected parents/caregivers at both demonstration and comparison sites were asked questions regarding home and school communication. They were asked if they had the opportunity to give input to teachers, whether teachers followed through on their suggestions, if their opinions on schools decisions were solicited, and whether they were pleased with the communication between their homes and schools. Parents/caregivers from demonstration sites were also asked what effect the SDTP had on their interactions with their children's teachers. During home visits, parents/caregivers discussed their expectations of schools and teachers; the discussions add to the interview data to provide additional insight. Responses suggest answers to two of our questions: (a) What do parents expect from teachers, and (b) do comparison and demonstration parents have different expectations. Parent/caregiver responses will be separated into comparison and demonstration sections.

Comparison Teachers' Expectations

Kindergarten teachers interviewed in 1993 felt that their greatest challenges to teaching were to, (a) provide children with interesting yet challenging material, (b) meet the needs of all the children who come in at so many different levels, and (c) keep calm and be a good role model.

Three of the eight kindergarten teachers interviewed pointed to family problems as a challenge. The teachers felt that parents need to develop better parenting skills and become more involved in their children's education. A teacher identified her challenge as, "Working with increasing family problems that interfere with children's learning." A second teacher thought that working parents were a problem. She said, "...many parents are working and not aware of their kids' education. The challenge is to get them involved."

The kindergarten teachers generally felt that the role of parents in their children's education should be supportive. A teacher said, "Have to be supportive, read to them, let them know what they are doing is very important, and let them do their best. Show interest by visiting [the classroom]." In contrast, one teacher felt that parents should, "have kids clean, well fed, and healthy...be involved."

In 1994, thirteen teachers first grade teachers and six kindergarten teachers were interviewed. The teachers cited the same challenges as they had in the previous year, meeting the individual needs of the children who are at so many different levels of development, and children who are behavior problems.

One of the kindergarten teachers identified many challenges; the challenges were primarily related to the children's home environments. She said:

> Children are coming from such different backgrounds that it is so difficult to meet their needs.... FAS, blended families, and single parent homes. We can't change their home environments. There are some children who have so much, and some have so many problems.... Can't do anything. Kids are molested and abused, and we are getting so many of those. We have kids coming to school without eating. I used to think it was good to show them a different way, and then they go home and what do they think? We have so many high risk children. I went to court so many times....

The kindergarten teachers echoed their previous years responses regarding parents' roles. Generally teachers felt that parents should be involved and supportive. One teacher stated that she would like parents to show up for conferences when scheduled.

The first grade teachers' responses were similar to those of the kindergarten teachers. They were challenged by meeting so many different needs, finding time to do everything, having the energy to keep up with them, and discipline. Of the thirteen teachers, three gave one word responses, discipline, while two additional teachers noted behavior modification.

The first grade teachers had lengthy responses regarding the roles of parents. Responses generally involved wishing that the parents were more involved with their children's education. The teachers would like parents to follow up at home

with what is done in school, volunteer in the classroom by listening to their children read or as an aide, and be a team member with the teacher. Several teachers would like parents to, "...make sure the child is healthy, well fed, and well rested."

Negative responses of four of the first grade teachers are of particular note. The teachers felt that parents were demanding more from the schools, such as expecting the teachers to teach skills that the children should have learned at home. One of the four teachers said, "They [parents] do less and less and expect more and more. They should listen [to their children] but not necessarily believe what they hear. Read the communication from the school, be a good role model, read to their kids, and ask questions."

The same thirteen first grade teachers interviewed in 1994 were interviewed in 1995, plus twelve second grade teachers were interviewed. The first grade teachers' responses were similar to their responses of the previous year. The second grade teachers responded similar to the first grade teachers.

In the fall of 1995, three additional second teachers were hired by several of the school districts. The total teachers who were interviewed in 1996 rose to twenty-eight, fifteen second grade teachers and thirteen third grade teachers. The interviews reflected very different challenges than those recorded during the previous three years of interviewing. The majority of the teachers stated that discipline problems were their major challenge. A teacher said, "Discipline, because

many parents don't know how to discipline properly. Another reason is that both parents working is a downfall in our society."

As stated earlier, several of the teachers said that parents were their main challenge as teachers! One of the teachers defined the problem with parents as, "Dealing with kids from homes where education is obviously not a priority, where discipline is slack, and little help is offered to the kids."

Even though the teachers were from different sites, they all felt that the role of parents in education should be, as one teacher said, "...to promote and support education...provide help at home, set up a specific time for homework, and communicate with teachers regularly."

In summary, the teachers seemed to be increasingly frustrated with a lack of parent involvement and support of their children's education and with the increasing numbers of children with behavior problems. Teachers would like parents to take care of their children's basic needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing; take an active role in the education of their children; communicate regularly with the teachers; support the schools and the teachers; and work with the teachers as a team member for the good of the children.

Demonstration Teachers' Expectations

Kindergarten teachers in demonstration schools and kindergarten teachers in comparison schools felt similar challenges to teaching and had similar opinions of parental roles. According to the seven kindergarten teachers from demonstration schools who were interviewed in 1993, meeting the individual needs of the children

was their greatest challenge. They also felt that parents should support their children and schools and be involved in their children's educational experiences. From one teacher's viewpoint, "My greatest challenge is the planning for the wide range of students. We are getting so many children in need, because of the breakdown of the family. These are T-V kids, who are poor, dirty, have no social skills, and start out with a deficit....Parents should be cheerleaders. Too often they are not. They should also encourage their children in any way they can and foster and encourage independence."

In 1994, five of the seven kindergarten teachers and twelve first grade teachers were interviewed. The responses of the kindergarten teachers were similar to those of the previous year. All of the teachers felt that their greatest challenge was to meet the individual needs of all the students. Several of the teachers felt they were also challenged by their own energy levels and coming up with new ideas for centers. The first grade teachers had responses similar to those of the kindergarten teachers. They felt challenged by all the different ability levels of the students, having enough patience and energy, and thinking of new ideas. One teacher felt challenged by the home situation of her students. She said:

> Hard seeing my kids come to school and knowing they have been neglected or abused, reporting it, and knowing that nothing has been done about it. It is frustrating only to be able to report things. It has been a bad year for me. It [abuse] happens way too much.

All the first grade teachers felt that parents should be involved and supportive of both their children and the schools. One teacher said:

> Parents should feel comfortable coming into the classroom either as an observer or as an active participant. They should support the school but feel comfortable enough to question it. Parents should be interactive with their children, read to their children, and have fun with their children.

In 1995 ten first grade and ten second grade teachers were interviewed. Of the ten first grade teachers, the majority stated that their greatest challenge was to meet the individual needs of the students. The majority of the second grade teachers responded similar to the first grade teachers, but several listed "time to get everything in" as a challenge. One second grade teacher noted that discipline and the lack of parent involvement were challenges.

All first and second grade teachers defined the roles of parents in education as active roles. Parents should "actively participate in their children's educational experiences," "support their children and the school," "listen to their children," and "encourage them." One teacher said, "Parents are children's first and most important teachers. I wish they realized how important they are to their children's educational success."

In 1996 eleven second grade teachers and ten third grade teachers were interviewed. Half of the second grade teachers felt that meeting the individual needs of their students was their greatest challenge to teaching. Several of the second grade teachers were challenged by the lack of support from parents. One of

the teachers felt that parents were the greatest challenge. The teacher said, "Parents, because they don't find out from the teacher what actually happened. They listen to the children and go right to the principal or the school board. They [parents] need to ask the teacher."

The majority of the third grade teachers felt that discipline was their greatest challenge to teaching. The remainder of the teachers felt that their greatest challenge was meeting the individual needs of the students.

The second and third grade teachers defined parental roles similar to the roles defined earlier. Teachers felt that parents should encourage children, support children and teachers, and be aware of their major roles in children's education. In fact, several teachers felt that parents were one of the most important parts of children's education. A teacher stated:

> [Parent are] one of the most important parts. It is essential that they [parents] view education as the most important part of the children's lives and do things with their children at home. It is important that they relay the message that they [children] should do the best that they can do.

In summary, the demonstration teachers would like parents to be active participants in their children's educational experiences both at home and at school. Teachers would also like to see parents support and work with them for the educational success of the children.

Comparison Parents' Expectations

In 1993, all ten comparison parents/caregivers who were interviewed felt that

they were given an opportunity to give input to their children's teachers and were satisfied with communication between their homes and their schools. Only half of the parents/caregivers, however, felt that school administrators wanted their opinion on important school policies or activities. One parent in particular was especially displeased with communication between the school and her home and with her child's experience in kindergarten. The parent said that the school's attitude seemed to be, "What do we have to do for you." That perspective, she stated, contrasted sharply with Head Start's attitude of, "What can we do for you."

In 1994, no comparison parents were interviewed. I also did not conduct any observations at homes or schools in any of the comparison sites. My time was spent generating data at the demonstration sites.

Data on thirteen comparison parents/caregivers were gathered in 1995. As a result of the interviews, we learned that most parents/caregivers felt that they had opportunities to give input to their children's teachers. The opportunities were mainly offered during parent-teacher conferences. Most of the parents felt that teachers "usually" followed through on their suggestions, even though the parents/caregivers frequently noted that they never actually had any suggestions for the teachers.

Of particular importance, is that fact that eleven of the thirteen parents/caregivers felt that they were never asked for any input into administrative decisions on school policies or activities. Parents/caregivers were generally satisfied

with communication between home and school, in spite of not being involved in school activity or policy decisions.

In 1996, eighteen comparison parents/caregivers were interviewed. All except three felt that the teachers followed through on their suggestions. Only half of the parents/caregivers felt that school administrators wanted their opinion on school policy and activity decisions. One parent said, "If you go to a PTO [Parent Teacher Organization] meeting you can give input, but they do what they want anyway not what the parents want." All except two parents/caregivers were satisfied with communication between their homes and the schools. The parents offered two suggestions: (a) more coordination between school board, administration, and teachers; and (b) more parental involvement in the policy making of the school.

In summary, the majority of the parents/caregivers felt that they were given opportunities to give input to the teachers about their children's unique qualities and needs and that the teachers followed through on the suggestions. Parents/caregivers believed that school administrators did not want their opinions about decisions on school policies or activities, yet they remained satisfied with home and school communication.

Demonstration Parents' Expectations

Parents/caregivers at demonstration sites had opinions similar to those of the comparison parents who were interviewed in 1993. Thirteen of the twenty-three parents/caregivers interviewed in 1993 said that school administrators do not ask

them for their opinion on important school policies or activities. Several parents also felt that teachers were not receptive to their suggestions, and the parents were not satisfied with home-school communication. Parents/caregivers wanted increased communication between schools and homes. Some of the parents/caregivers felt that the SDTP had helped with their interactions with teachers by motivating them to become more involved in the educational experiences of their children.

In 1994, eighteen parents/caregivers were interviewed. The majority of the parents were satisfied with communication between the schools and their homes and felt that the teachers followed through on their suggestions. Eleven of the eighteen parents/caregivers who were interviewed did not feel that they had any input into administrative decisions on school policies or activities. The parents would like to have school-home communication improve, would like teachers to receive their suggestions "more graciously," and would like to be respected by the teachers. One parent said, "Suggestions that I give them they always act like I don't know what I'm talking about." The parents think that the SDTP has improved their interactions with teachers by making it, "easier to talk to the teachers."

The journals of family service coordinators help us to understand part of the communication problems which arise between teachers and parents. According to the journals, parents feel intimidated by schools, do not wish to interfere in the schools, and feel negative about the schools. Parents trust the FSCs, speak freely

with them about the schools, and yet are hesitant to express their opinions to the schools. The journal of one FSC discussed the frustrations of one of the parents:

> She [parent] has asked her teacher for more work to take home, because her daughter is a little behind. But at the same time the teacher expects the mother to be able to work continuously with her daughter at home. The parent is seeing how other classes are more advance than her daughter's room is and is getting more help from another teacher than her daughter's teacher.

In 1995, sixteen parents/caregivers were interviewed. All except one felt that the teachers followed through on their suggestions, while three parent/caregivers did not think that they had ever given any suggestions. Half of the parents/caregivers did not think that their opinions on administrative policies and activities were ever solicited. All except four of the parents/caregivers were pleased with communication between the schools and their homes. Two parents who were displeased with communication, (a) "would like to know more of what is going on. I rely on my child and I would rather see it in writing (like a note)," and (b) "would like some sort of system where parents could feel more welcome in the school. I think it [visiting the classroom] is important. I do not like interrupting the teacher. I wish there would be a set time."

Eighteen parents/caregivers were interviewed in 1996. All of the parents/caregivers felt that they had opportunities to give input to their children's teachers and that the teachers followed through on their suggestions. A parent who

described the interaction between herself and her child's teacher said, "At parent-teacher conferences, plus any other time I know they will listen. I don't have to point out my child's qualities. The teachers are professional and know these things. I do bring my concerns, and they bring me their concerns; it is a two-way conversation."

Most of the parents/caregivers felt that school administrators asked for their opinion about decisions on school policies or activities. Of the ones who did not, several said that they were kept informed but were not consulted. The parents/caregivers also stated that if they wanted to give more input they could do it through attending parent teacher organizations, visiting principals, or attending school board meetings.

All except two parents/caregivers were satisfied with communication between school and their homes. A dissatisfied parent wanted the school to mail messages to her house instead of sending them home with her child. She does not have a telephone, so is difficult for the school to reach her. She also wished that the teachers would come to her house and personally deliver their messages.

In summary, most parents/caregivers felt that they were given opportunities to give input to teachers about their children's unique qualities and needs and that the teachers followed through on the suggestions. Responses differed from year to year on whether or not school administrators wanted their opinion about decisions on school policies or activities. Most felt that if they wanted to give their opinion, school administrators would be open to it. The parents were aware of the

procedures to make to make their wishes known. Parents/caregivers were satisfied with home-school communication, and many thought that the SDTP helped improve communication.

Discussion

Parents/caregivers, in contrast to teachers, have never been asked exactly what they expect from teachers. What do parents want? Why have we not asked parents this question? What do parents think their role in education should be? Why do we tell parents what their role should be? Why do we treat parents like children? What types of parent involvement do teachers want? What have teachers done to encourage or facilitate parent involvement? What have school administrators done to encourage or facilitate parent involvement? Do teachers and parent/caregivers define parent involvement differently? As usual, our research has generated more questions than it has answered.

We will discuss parent/caregiver expectations and teacher expectations in the next two sections. Similarities and differences between their responses will be dealt with in the third and fourth sections of the discussion.

Parent/Caregiver Expectations

Parents/caregivers seemed to care little whether or not school administrators ask them for their opinions. It may represent the trust that the public has in education. It may also represent what teachers and principals have been complaining about for years - that parents have given up the role of education to the schools and care little about being involved in that process. Another, and more

probable, interpretation is that parents feel "disempowered" or "powerless" in school policy or school activity issues. As one parent had stated, "...they do what they want anyway, not what parents' want." Zeldin (1990) suggests that it may be necessary to grant local stakeholders, such as parents and teachers, control over decision making in order to develop and maintain partnerships between the two groups. Research shows that achievement is advanced when parents and children work together on educational activities for children (Epstein, 1995; Zeldin, 1990).

Comparison parents/caregivers seemed less informed and less comfortable with schools than demonstration parents/caregivers. Both comparison and demonstration parents/caregivers felt that teachers listened to their suggestions. More demonstration parents/caregivers than comparison parents/caregivers felt a part of administrative decision making. Both groups were generally satisfied with communication, although parents/caregivers from demonstration sites were more pleased.

We suggest that demonstration parents/caregivers are more informed, more comfortable with schools, and more satisfied with home-school communication because of the SDTP. Family service coordinators have actively encouraged parents to become involved in the schools and have encouraged schools to involve parents. They have assisted teachers by enlisting parent/caregiver volunteers to help in classrooms with centers, by reading to children, and with computer activities. Family service coordinators have also assisted schools by recruiting parent/caregiver volunteers to work in school libraries. Several of the FSCs distribute Hooked on

Phonics kits to parents at their sites, and all of the FSCs provide parents with lists of school and community activities, and educational pamphlets at home visits. All of the activities serve to acquaint parents with the schools. Parents who are familiar with schools feel like becoming more involved (Ames, 1993; Epstein, 1995; Funk & Brown, 1996; Griffith, 1996; Huffman et al., 1996; Keith et al., 1996; Mantzicopoulos & Neuharth-Pritchett, 1996; Moore & Brown, 1996; Rogers Tracy, 1995; Rosenthal & Young Sawyers, 1996; Sanders, 1996; Thompson, 1996; Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992; Vickers, 1994; Zeldin, 1990).

Another way family service coordinators assist with communication is through their role as liaisons between homes and schools. Family service coordinators inform parents/caregivers of teachers' concerns and inform teachers of parents' concerns and home situations. Parents are also encouraged to take their issues to teachers, principals, and school board members.

Both comparison and demonstration parents/caregivers offered suggestions for changing schools. We can draw a few assumptions about parent/caregiver expectations from the data, namely that parents/caregivers want

1. to feel welcomed into the classrooms;
2. to be kept informed of their children's progress;
3. to be able to share concerns with the teachers;
4. teachers to listen to them and to respect their opinion;
5. to receive positive information, not just negative, from the teachers;
6. more frequent communication from teachers;

7. notes to be mailed home instead of being sent with the children;
8. teachers to work together;
9. teachers to use the same methods to ease children's transitions;
10. to be given specific times in which they can routinely visit classrooms;
11. coordination between teachers, school boards, and administrators; and,
12. to be treated as equals.

A review of the literature offered little insight into what parents want from teachers. The paucity of research reveals the low emphasis research has given parent/caregiver expectations. The few articles we did find seemed to support our findings. We discovered that suggestions by parents were not "graciously received," and that parents wanted to be treated as equals. Lindle (1989) noted that parents felt patronized by teachers. Lindle also noted that parents wanted informal contacts with teachers; parents in our research wanted similar contacts. Ames (1993) discovered that parents evaluated teachers on the basis of their communication practices, and our research found similar results.

Teacher Expectations

Comparison teachers seemed to be increasingly frustrated by the lack of parent involvement in the school and the increased numbers of disciplinary problems in their classrooms. While parent involvement was perceived by demonstration teachers as higher than that of comparison teachers; they had similar expectations of what they wanted from parents. The teachers stated that they want parents/caregivers to:

1. provide for children's basic needs,
2. have good parenting skills (discipline properly),
3. be involved in children's educational experiences at home and at school
4. support, encourage, and listen to their children,
5. show up for conferences when scheduled,
6. be good role models,
7. promote and support education at home,
8. support the schools,
9. communicate regularly with the teachers,
10. feel comfortable in the classrooms,
11. foster and encourage independence in their children,
12. be aware of their very important role in their children's education.

Essentially, what teachers have described as wanting from parents is what Cataldo (1987) has defined as the six basic areas of parenting skills: (a) providing basic physical care and shelter; (b) modeling a healthy family life; (c) behavior management of children; (d) rational, affectionate, parental sensitivity, and responsiveness to children's emotional and social needs; (e) parental management of the child's activities and educational needs; and (f) family's use of community resources and schools. The last two skills noted by Cataldo (1987) were noted in some form in nearly every teacher's interview. Teachers' expectations of parents are confirmed by the research which encourages and supports parent involvement (Epstein, 1995; Funk & Brown, 1996; Griffith, 1996; Huffman et al., 1996; Keith et al.,

1996; Mantzicopoulos & Neuharth-Pritchett, 1996; Moore & Brown, 1996; Rogers Tracy, 1995; Rosenthal & Young Sawyers, 1996; Sanders, 1996; Thompson, 1996; Vacha & McLaughlin, 1992; Vickers, 1994; Zeldin, 1990).

Similarities in Parent and Teacher Responses

Similarities in parent/caregiver and teacher responses do exist. Parents/caregivers and teachers find the most agreement in their desire for the educational success of the children. Similarities are also found in their desires (a) to be respected, (b) to have increased communication between homes and schools, and (c) for parents/caregivers to feel welcomed and comfortable in the classrooms.

The desire for home-school communication is not limited to the participants in our study; it is supported by the research (Ames, 1993; Moore & Brown, 1996; Vickers, 1994). In a study by Ames (1993), parents who received more frequent communication from teachers evaluated the teachers more positively. Research has found that positive frequent communication from schools to homes has improved teacher-parent relationships (Ames, 1993; Chrispeels, 1996; Rosenthal & Young Sawyers, 1996; Thompson, 1996; Vickers, 1994; Zeldin, 1990). Seldom has literature discussed the importance of communication from homes to schools. Since both groups seem to value communication as important, it would seem important to encourage increased communication from both parents/caregivers and teachers.

Differences in Parent and Teacher Responses

There appeared to be more differences between parent/caregiver and teacher responses than similarities. Teachers want parents/caregivers to become more

involved in their children's education, yet parents do not feel welcome in the classrooms, do not feel teachers will listen to them or respect their opinions, and feel they are already involved in their children's education. A report by Marttila and Kiley (1995) support parents' contentions of involvement. The report stated, "By their own estimation, American parents are deeply involved in their children's education - at least to the extent that involvement is defined in terms of activities that take place within the home, such as reading and checking on homework (Marttila & Kiley, 1995, p. 2).

Rosenthal and Young Sawyers (1996) stated that the delineation of "informal" and "formal" education has created a boundary between families and schools, placing them into two separate and sometimes adversarial worlds. Part of the problem, according to Rosenthal and Young Sawyers (1996, p. 195), is that, "parents' roles in school settings are rarely discussed, making their responsibilities unclear and making it likely that they will only be called upon when their children are having problems."

Parents/caregivers see teachers as the key to their children's education, as did the parents in the 1995 report by Marttila and Kiley. The responses of the teachers seem to indicate that the key is the parents/caregivers and the interest of the parents/caregivers in education. In other words, each group sees the other as important to the success of children. Perhaps this is a starting point for developing a partnership between these two very important groups of people; a partnership based on mutual interest in children, mutual respect, and mutual cooperation. Shared

responsibility and collaboration between the two groups, according to Zeldin (1990), are necessary for the educational success of children. To follow the plant metaphor of the introduction, children will develop and "bloom" when the significant people in their lives work together.

Significance of Study

The comprehensive, early-education intervention efforts of the SDTP are an attempt to improve the life-chances for children by improving their home and school environments. As Gleason stated, "The concepts are simple. Children can't learn if they're hungry or sick" (1993, p. 31). Understanding interaction patterns and perceptions of parents and teachers will help researchers, practitioners, and policy makers interpret SDTP implementation problems and provide solutions. Learning what parents want from schools and what teachers want from parents is fundamentally important to all SDTP participants.

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